Naked Ape or Techno Sapiens?

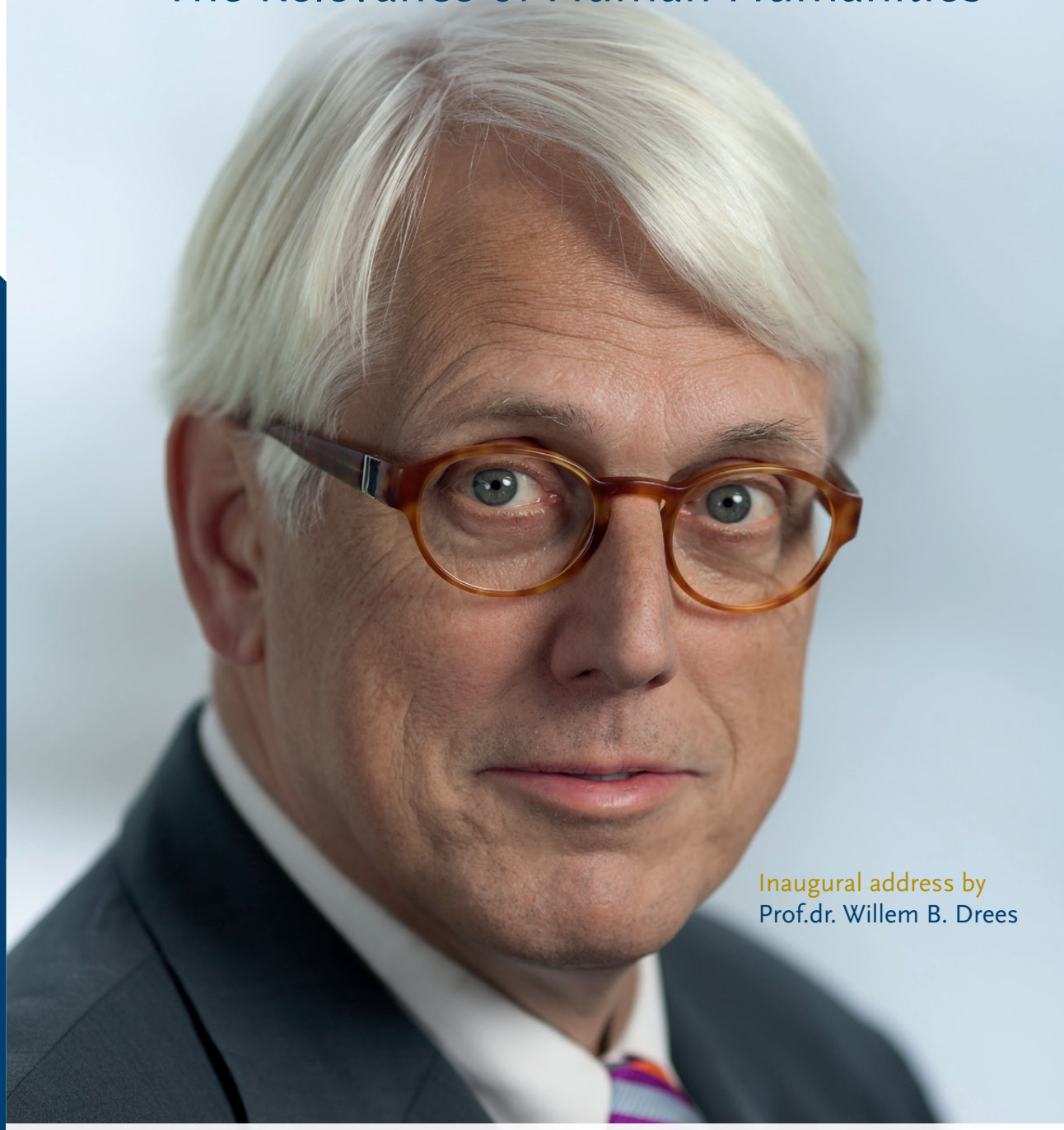
Drees, W.B.

Publication date:
2015

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Naked Ape or Techno Sapiens?

The Relevance of Human Humanities



Inaugural address by
Prof.dr. Willem B. Drees

Tilburg University

Understanding Society

Willem B. Drees (1954) is Professor of Philosophy of the Humanities at Tilburg University, dean of the Tilburg School of Humanities, and the editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. Drees studied theoretical physics at Utrecht University, theology at the Universities of Amsterdam and Groningen, and earned doctorates in theology and in philosophy (Groningen, 1989, *cum laude*; Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, 1994).

Drees came to Tilburg University from Leiden University, where he has been professor of Philosophy of Religion, Ethics, and the Encyclopedia of Theology (2001-2014), dean of the Faculty of Theology/ Religious Studies (2005-2008), and vice-dean of the Faculty of Humanities (2009-2013). Previously, he has held the Nicolette Bruining Chair for Philosophy of Religion from a Liberal Protestant perspective at Twente University (1995-2001). He twice received a Fulbright grant, for research in Berkeley, Chicago and Princeton. His first dissertation won the Prins Bernhardfonds Prijs (renamed Keetje Hodson prize) and the prize of the Legatum Stolpianum. He has delivered the Samuel Ferguson Lectures in Manchester, UK and the Andreas Idreos Lectures in Oxford, UK. Drees was Dickinson Distinguished Visiting Professor at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, USA, and held a visiting fellowship at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
Among his publications are *Religion and Science: A Guide to the Debates* (Routledge, 2010), *Religion, Science and Naturalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), and *Beyond the Big Bang: Quantum Cosmologies and God* (Open Court, 1990), and over twenty edited volumes including *Is Nature Ever Evil? Religion, Science and* Value (Open Court, 2003), *Technology, Trust and* Religion (Leiden University Press, 2009), and, with Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, *The Study of Religion and the Training of Muslim Clergy in Europe: Academic and Religious Freedom in the 21st Century* (Leiden University Press, 2008). Additional information can be found at *www.drees.nl*.

Naked Ape or Techno Sapiens?

The Relevance of Human Humanities

Inaugural address
delivered at Tilburg University on 30 January 2015
upon the public acceptance of the appointment
as professor of Philosophy of the Humanities
by Willem B. Drees.

ISBN: 978-94-6167-229-2

www.tilburguniversity.edu

Naked Ape or Techno Sapiens? The Relevance of Human Humanities

In *The Naked Ape,* published in 1967, zoologist Desmond Morris treated human behavior just as he would have described and explained the behavior of other animals. His discussion of sexual signals, intimacy, the male penis and the female breasts attracted widespread attention. In the half century since Morris's book came out, sociobiology, evolutionary psychology and primatology have developed considerably. Some authors believe that biology and neurology provide 'the truth' about our nature; "we are our brains".[1] Biology and neuroscience deal with human nature. What job is left for the humanities?

I love the natural sciences. Physics, my first intellectual love, has a great mathematical purity, beauty and simplicity. Biology and the neurosciences are more messy, but fascinating. The natural sciences are about the world out there, but they are also about us. We are physical, chemical and biological beings. *The Naked Ape* applies to us, humans.

However, I don't see any naked apes in this hall. You all dressed nicely today. For me and my fellow professors, these gowns set us apart. This dress code is a cultural code. The term 'naked apes' is misleading, even though we do indeed not have any fur. To refer to us as 'dressed apes' would still be misleading. Culture is not like a dress that covers our naked existence; culture is intrinsic to our human identity. By nature, we are 'cultural animals'.

I have been appointed here at Tilburg University as professor of *Philosophy of the Humanities* and dean of the *Tilburg School of Humanities*. Not surprisingly, then, the *humanities* will be the main focus of my lecture today. I will first speak about *humans,* before discussing the nature and relevance of the humanities, the role of English in our cultural context, and the situation here in Tilburg. Once this lecture as a 'rite de passage' is over, you can all get drinks and socialize. In the spirit of Desmond Morris, who draws on the Dutch primatologist Jan van Hooff for the observation, social conversation might be the human variant of apes grooming their fellow apes.

[1] The book title by Dick Swaab, *Wij zijn ons brein* (2012), suggests a strong program for the neurosciences. An earlier voice has been Fancis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA (1953), who wrote in the opening lines of his book *The Astonishing Hypothesis* (1994) that 'the Astonishing Hypothesis' is that you, the reader, are "nothing but a pack of neurons", paraphrasing Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. The Queen of Hearts orders that Alice be beheaded. Alice then retorts: "Who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!", and awakes.

Humans

Before we come to reflect upon the humanities, let us consider humans, ourselves. We have been shaped by biology, culture, and technology, and we are reshaping our biology, culture and technology.

We are biological beings

We are natural beings, and always will be. Physics, chemistry and biology are not a launching pad left behind once we have taken off. We are physics, chemistry and biology at work. As the philosopher John Dewey (1934, 3) wrote:

> Mountain tops do not flow unsupported. They do not even just rest upon the earth. They *are* the earth in one of its manifest operations.

As natural beings, we are the realization of a particular possibility of nature, the possibility of personal existence. Important to my understanding of the humanities are two fertile features of the biological process: the *diversities* it generates and the role of *circularities* throughout the process.

Biology generates *diversity*. Many life forms co-exist. Each individual is different, due to minor variation in the genetic and environmental legacy involved. Biology is like history: in the course of time, many thresholds have been passed. Historical transitions cannot be undone easily; once we have learned to do something, it is hard to forget it. Once hominids had managed to master fire, make tools, communicate through language, such inventions became a given for later generations. Over time the legacy became more complex, and thereby arose possibilities for further forms of diversity.

Organisms not only adapt to their given environment; they also reshape their environment and thus construct niches which may suit them better. *Circularity* is abundant in the natural world, beginning with the chemistry of DNA and proteins, if not much earlier. In logic, self-reference may be fatal, as in a phrase like "This sentence is false". If the sentence is false, it is true. But if it is true, it is false. Circularity may be powerless, as Baron Munchhausen who claimed to have extracted himself from a moor by pulling himself up by his bootstraps. In reality, however, circularity tends to be enormously powerful, an ascending spiral.[2]

[2] Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979) may be the book that did most to popularize the fertility of circularity (self-reference, recursion). In his final chapter, Hofstadter spoke of 'strange loops', when a system has a part that is isomorph with the system. In a mathematical context this implies that the system has true propositions that are not provable within the system, the incompleteness theorem of Kurt Gödel, which applies to systems that need not be more complex than regular arithmetic with natural numbers.

Over time, with innumerable transitions, organized matter has become, among much else, Mozart, Einstein, Jesus, Buddha – and each of us. Such a naturalistic view of us is not one that downgrades humans. Rather, it should make us appreciate the rich possibilities of nature.[3]

We are cultural beings Culture has made us the beings we are. We have remarkable brains and vocal cords, because these biological adaptations were selected for by the cultural and social demands of earlier hominid existence. The flexibility of our hands, our prolonged infancy and capacities for learning: it is adaptations like these that make culture possible, but they are also consequences of the cultural needs of our ancestors. We are the product of circularity, or rather of the fertile spiral of bio-cultural evolution. In our bodies and our brains, we are cultural.

Language is a key ingredient of cultural existence. This is expressed well in the book title *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Human Brain*, by Terrence Deacon, a biological anthropologist. As this book is almost two decades old, I am expecting to learn more about language and cognition from my new colleagues in our School of Humanities. Language is a major example of circularity: At this moment, I am using language to speak about language. Language has a further property: It allows us to present to ourselves and to others that which is not present. Language makes it possible to speak about plans, about dreams, about possibilities, and even about impossibilities.

Worldviews, religious and secular, are typical of humans as cultural beings. A worldview brings together models *of* the world and models *for* the world, ideas about what there is and about how we should act.[4] Let me give an example. Two months ago I had the pleasure of chairing a panel discussion on *Why We Disagree about Climate Change*, a book by Mike Hulme. The panelists agreed that the controversy over climate change is not just an issue of scientific knowledge. Persistent disagreements involve worldviews and political agendas. A modernist might take climate change as a problem that we should solve by good science, engineering and management. An activist such as Naomi Klein with her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, might appropriate climate change as a welcome catalyst for major social and economic change. Someone else may lament the loss of our personal relationship with 'nature', and argue for an ecological life style. A fourth may approach this as an ecumenical project, drawing on science to create

[3] On various occasions Arthur Peacocke thus expressed his appreciation of matter becoming humans.

[4] 'Models of the world/ models for the world' is inspired by Clifford Geertz (1973). He speaks of a religion as nourishing an ethos (model for the world) and a worldview (model of the world).

a new common story to inspire us all. As humans we have to live with such a diversity of perspectives and interests, and thus need to promote a civil and democratic process that allows the plurality of voices to be heard.[5]

Convergence has arisen in some domains. Within groups, moral codes take precedence over individual interests. From counting and measuring we have created mathematics, which in its abstraction goes far beyond the particular circumstances of any time, place or language. In the natural sciences, with generalizations, the testing of theories about underlying mechanisms, and the intentional exclusion of non-epistemic values, we have discovered knowledge that transcends cultural diversity, even though the reception of such insights is highly diverse, loaded with various preferences.[6]

We are technological beings

Our identities and responsibilities, the communities we belong to, our attitudes, hopes, dreams, and nightmares are shaped by rapidly evolving technology. Antibiotics and sewage systems have changed our sense of vulnerability. Contraception has changed relations between men and women and between parents and their children. The Internet has changed the nature of information and communication. Whether we like it or not, technology has made our world significantly different, although we have not entered a different world.

We are not in a different world, but we have made this world different. Talking about the Internet as creating 'a digital world' might suggest a separate domain, free floating and remote from traditional human activities. Such language was severely criticized by Michael Dertouzos, director of the M.I.T. Computer lab, in an essay published in1981. (This is well before the invention of the World Wide Web version of the Internet, first realized by Tim Berners-Lee between two computers at CERN in December 1990. Our current students are the first generation that has grown up with the web.) Dertouzos (1997, 11) wrote:

> The press and most soothsayers tell us we must prepare ourselves to enter Cyberspace – a gleaming otherworld with new rules and majestic gadgets, full of virtual reality, intelligent agents, multimedia, and much more. Baloney! The Industrial Revolution didn't take us into 'Motorspace'. It brought motors into our lives as refrigerators that preserved our food and cars that transported us – creations that served human

[5] Key note speech by Mike Hulme; other contributors included Annick Hedlund-de Witt (Delft University; see also Hedlund-de Witt 2013) and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Yale University). Contributions will be published in 2015 in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*.

[6] See for instance, Philip Kitcher, *The Ethical Project* (2011) and Kitcher, *The Advancement of Science* (1993). On the exclusion of non-epistemic values, see McMullin (1983) and Ruse (1999, 2012).

> needs. Yes, there will be new gadgets, which will be fun to use. But the point is that the Information Marketplace will bring useful information technologies into our lives, not propel us into some science fiction universe.

Technology does not transport us into a different world, but we should not underestimate the extent to which it has made our world different, and will continue to do so. The way digital technologies transform culture, including the way we express ourselves in rituals, narratives and art, is central to a recently redesigned Bachelor's program in Cultural Studies, while the interaction of humans and digital technologies is central to our Communication and Information Sciences program.

Technology changes us. We are *artificial by nature*, to use a phrase by Helmuth Plessner, which was recently used as the title for a book by Jos de Mul, philosopher at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. We use technological images to speak about ourselves and our experiences. Ever needed 'to blow off steam'? The metaphor is still alive, even though steam engines are a thing of the past. Do you not feel the need to 'clean up your hard disk' when you suffer from 'information overload'? Who has never been 'subject to stress' or under 'huge pressure'?[7]

We are not merely shaped by technology; we are its creators as well; a further example of circularity. The powers we have acquired may give rise to an unnerving question: Are we overstepping a boundary? Are we 'playing God?' The 'playing God' metaphor is used in two different contexts. The traditional meaning can be illustrated by concerns we may have about the death penalty: Are we allowed to decide on issues of life and death? There is no doubt that we have the power to do so; the grave question is whether we should use it.

However, another form of the question arises when we acquire new powers. When we act, we do so in a context that is given. Those given conditions might be ascribed to God or to fate. With the acquisition of new powers a shift occurs in the boundary between that which is up to us and that which is given. We find issues now coming within our domain of responsibility that used to be non-moral as they were never before up to us to take decisions about. Nervousness about 'playing God' may well be about *new* moral, political and legal issues that were never on the table before.[8]

---

[7] De Mul (2014). On images of humans and technology, see (Coolen 1992; also Achterhuis e.a. 1997; Munnik 2005).

[8] Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, 442-446.

If one accepts the picture I have been sketching, of a co-evolution of biology and culture, and of a culture that has become deeply technological, one will also readily acknowledge that living with a shifting boundary is nothing new. Living with structural change is unavoidably part of the human condition, it is part of the spiral of being conditioned and shaping conditions. We are at the same time products and actors.

People are ambivalent about new technologies. Much is taken for granted, and even more is expected or feared. A recent dystopian novel is *The Circle* by Dave Eggers (2013). A young woman lands the job she dreams of at 'The Circle', the world's most powerful internet company stationed in Silicon Valley. The company seeks to use all the data it collects for good causes, for instance to return abducted children to their parents and to promote transparency in politics. One quiet evening she takes a kayak out into the Bay, she sees seals and enjoys the quietness of the night. In the world of massive data this escape does not go unnoticed. She should not have kept this experience to herself; handicapped persons might have enjoyed sharing her experience. One of the slogans of the company (clearly reminiscent of Orwell's 1984) becomes Privacy is Theft. An interesting use of language. The young woman goes "fully transparent", so that people can follow her activities via the web, and thousands do – and later millions. Politicians come under pressure to go fully transparent too. Soon all information will become readily available to all, everything will be transparent – which will make for a perfect world.

Earlier I spoke of 'circularity'. The novel suggests that we may come full circle; everything is about to become data, and thereby our lives will be transformed further. In the words of the novel, "the circle will close". But the circle will not close and cannot close. The company itself is not fully transparent, and it seems impossible that it ever could be. A map of reality that is as complete as reality itself cannot exist, as part of the reality the map intends to depict in full detail is the map itself – which brings one to the classic trick with images called the 'Droste effect', named after the image on the packaging of the Dutch Droste brand cocoa powder.

In dealing with ourselves as biological, cultural and technological beings, with our powers as agents in constructing further technology and living with the technologies that we have constructed, there is much to be studied and reflected upon. We must consider critical questions, questions as to who profits and who suffers from adverse consequences, and whether the technology facilitates extreme forms of surveillance and centralized control. However, as I said before, it is impossible to close the circle. I believe in the human potential for creativity and wisdom, precisely because of the possibility of self-reflection, of a circularity that takes the form of a spiral rather than a closed circle.

There are genuine challenges that require reflection. With new powers, we need to become wise (or at least wiser) – we need to become *techno sapiens*. From 'naked ape' to 'techno sapiens': we are biological and technological, in a globalizing, data-driven world. Whether *sapiens*, wise, is an appropriate self-designation remains to be seen, but at least it is something we should aspire to be.

Humanities

We have considered humans as products of culture and technology, as actors producing culture and technology, and as beings who are self-reflective and thereby caught in circularities. I now come to the main topic of this lecture, 'the humanities'. The diversity of disciplines grouped under the umbrella of 'the humanities' is staggering. I will begin with a few comments on the term 'the humanities', followed by a tentative definition, a reflection on the dual character arising from the co-existence of insider and outsider perspectives, and end this section with a description of four types of humanities, before discussing their relevance in the next section.

An odd plural

The term 'humanities' is a plural. What would be the singular form of the noun? 'Humanity', so it might seem. However, while one can easily get from 'the sciences' to 'a science', this does not work for the humanities. The plural 'humanities' may be unavoidable, given the many facets of human existence. In the present context, 'humanity' has two relevant meanings:

- Humanity may refer to the collective, 'human beings', the human species, human nature;
- Humanity may have aesthetic and moral connotations, when the term stands for 'being civilized', or when one speaks of crimes against humanity.

When we come to consider four types of knowledge in the humanities, I will return also to the moral, civilizing connotation. Before doing so, let me say a few words on the humanities as the study of humans.

A definition

A novel is an example of human self-expression. In literary studies, a humanities discipline, the novel may be the object of study. If humans are characterized by self-understanding and self-expression, one could define the humanities as the scholarly study of such self-understandings (and their expressions). Thus, I offer as a tentative definition:

> Humanities are academic disciplines seeking *understanding of human self-understandings*.

Humanities are thus a *second-order* project, reflecting on human self-reflection. The humanities even include a third-order project, if one could separate levels so nicely, when philosophers seek to understand the humanities, that is, seek understanding of the understanding of human self-understanding. That is what my job is concerned with, *philosophy of* the humanities. A challenging task, as I have to study the work of my colleagues in the humanities, the ways in which they study humans in their cultural and technological behavior. Not a job I will ever complete.

Insider and outsider perspectives

The study of humans allows for various perspectives. Drawing on the grammatical structure of our language, I will distinguish here between a first-person, a second-person, and a third-person perspective.

The *first* person: that is me, articulating who I am or intend to be, my values, my loves, what is meaningful to me. (Less individually, this may also be someone articulating the perspective of a particular group, 'we'.) There is an insider perspective, involving what it means to be me, experientially and as an actor, what I value and stand for. There are concepts that I would use to describe my own actions and experiences. One might call these 'actor concepts'.

The *third*-person perspective: that is someone talking *about* me, or about people from Brabant, or about academics, or about some other tribe. Of course, an anthropologist – broadly conceived – can respect the insider discourse and for a while use the vocabulary of the tribe. However, the analysis uses a different vocabulary. For instance, an anthropologist looking at academic governance might come to see that the insider discourse favors rationality, but that underlying this there is "organized anarchy", with "fights" driven by interests. Such, be it all too brief and thus somewhat distorted, might seem to be one of the messages of my predecessor when in his valedictory lecture he spoke of the academic tribe and its governance, as if he were an outsider reflecting upon the world he had participated in (De Ruijter 2014, 8). With outsider discourse come analytical concepts, concepts that serve to analyze a situation, perhaps in terms that an insider would not accept.

Arie de Ruijter's valedictory lecture showed another example of circularity: The outsider description is received by insiders; there is no strict separation of spheres. Concepts may migrate from outsider to insider perspective, from analytical to actor concepts, and vice versa. My Leiden colleague Ab de Jong once analyzed the influence of religious studies on the religious traditions studied – a circularity that makes it naïve to think one can study

the traditions as if they are coming from a distant past.[9]

There is also the second person, the moment I address you. This is a major dimension of the humanities too – not just how I express myself, but also whether the message comes across as intended, and whether I understand you correctly. A technical term is hermeneutics – to remember this word, one might think of Hermes, the messenger god in the Greek pantheon. Humans communicate across various languages, living conditions, cultural heritage, and across centuries when we seek to 'understand' humans who wrote down their words long ago.

In brief: as humans we have insider and outsider perspectives, but things get messy as insiders appropriate outsider discourse; analytic concepts migrate and may become actor concepts. Migration of concepts is, of course, also a feature that we find occurring between domains. The language about DNA has drawn on linguistic notions, but DNA has itself become a metaphor for constituting structure as in 'the DNA of society'. Perhaps migration is even more common in modern 'management speak', referring to chaos and tipping points, appropriating the authority of the natural sciences in quite a different domain.

Types of knowledge in the humanities Multiple disciplines make up the humanities. Rather than listing disciplines, let me instead characterize four types of knowledge and scholarship in the humanities. The first two are both examples of a 'third-person' perspective, one emphasizing diversity while the other perspective gives primacy to commonalities.

1. Humanities provide us with knowledge of *particulars*. There are many languages, histories, religious and cultural traditions, ritual practices and literatures to be studied. These can be studied in detail and in depth, understanding a specific practice in its historical development and contemporary context, in interaction with competing practices. Studying particulars is difficult as we are shooting at a moving target; languages and traditions change. And there is one more complicating factor, as I found out in my initial conversations here in Tilburg, with Jan Blommaert and others, who familiarized me with a new term, 'superdiversity', which is used by some colleagues to emphasize that there is not only a plurality of groups (as in 'a

[9] (De Jong 2008); a related insight concerns the importance of synchronic approaches, even though religious self-understanding is often framed in diachronic terms as traditions (De Jong 2009). The Insider/Outsider terminology is appropriated from (McCutcheon 1999).

multicultural society') but also a diversity of influences coming together in individual lives, as diversity shapes individual identities.

The study of humans in their diversity needs to be undertaken from various perspectives. Linguists may use a phonetic script to represent the way a particular language is spoken (pronounced); phonetic script typically is the tool of an outsider. But one also needs to approximate the insider perspective, the way language is spoken and used. In this effort to learn about humans in their diversity, the scholar should not be judgmental, but rather methodologically agnostic. The scholarly interest lies in what words or practices mean to the humans studied, not in whether I share those beliefs or values.

Careful study of diversity also involves social and political issues. And by addressing the plurality of positions, scholarship may challenge claims about a possibly unique status. Scholarship of particulars might change the world that is being studied. However, the primary interest is in gathering knowledge about others, including those one does not identify with. How do they see the world? What is meaningful to them?

2. Humanities provide knowledge that focuses on *patterns*. With all the diversity among humans, there are also similarities. Patterns may arise due to a shared history or be the result of convergence in similar circumstances. Just as biologists studying the multitude of life forms also seek to find underlying similarities and mechanisms, so too do scholars in the humanities. Recently, Rens Bod wrote a book on the history of the humanities, titled *De vergeten wetenschappen*, a title which would translate into English as 'The forgotten sciences', a title betraying a Calimero-like attitude that I consider misguided and misrepresenting the status of the humanities in academia. The subtitle of the English edition, *A New History of the Humanities*, is: *The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*. Bod presents the humanities as similar to the natural sciences, and in many areas preceding the natural sciences in discovering patterns and very systematic approaches, e.g. in grammar, in philology (the reconstruction of texts), in musical theory, in logic, and in many other practices. Bod thus presents the humanities as sciences, searching for general laws based on sophisticated observations (and occasional experiments, but experiments are not necessary for a discipline to be a science – astronomy is not a domain of human experimentation either). In such research, the outsider perspective is dominant. In seeking patterns, there is less focus on what the specific texts, objects and practices mean to the people involved (as specific meanings tend to be diverse), and more on

what humans do, and how they do it.[10]

In these two orientations, the humanities might be compared to natural sciences such as chemistry, astronomy and biology. Scientists are studying the diversity of substances and their properties, of material clusters of stars and interstellar clouds, of life forms and their behavior, and they seek to grasp the underling mechanisms that have given rise to this diversity.

However, there is a complexity that is particular to the humanities: we ourselves are humans. We are not just studying others; we ourselves are part of the larger picture. This makes the pursuit different from studying microbes, plants, or extraterrestrials. Given this circularity of studying ourselves, two further types of scholarship in the *human humanities* arise, one that might be linked to dialogue, the second-person perspective, and one that relates to a first-person activity, reflection.

3. Scholarship in the humanities aspires to be *a dialogue, a quest to understand the self-understanding of another person* or community. Earlier I mentioned the hermeneutical dimension that comes with the second-person perspective. Not only do we seek knowledge about others in their specificity, and perhaps strangeness (see above, 1). They are fellow humans, and we might therefore learn something relevant for ourselves as well. Or at least, we owe it to them as humans to try to understand their motives, the way the world appears to them. To say that 'we ought to listen' is a moral conviction, one that I would include in the meaning of 'humanity' involved here. How might we come to see the world if we came to share their perspective? In *To kill a mocking* bird, a novel on racism in the southern United States in the early 20th century, a father tells his daughter: "First of all, if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folk. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view — until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." (Lee 1960, 32)

   Such work in the humanities might develop from the first type of research (the study of specific ideas and practices), combined with some sense of general patterns that helps to make it intelligible how their view could be appropriated in other

[10] Blommaert (2012, 11), in an essay on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Tilburg School of Humanities, also described the humanities as 'theory forming' by providing 'holistic' explanations, that is, explanations that integrate many different aspects. However, Blommaert emphasizes diversity and specificity, meanings to persons, social and political contexts, and the continuous change driven by technology, and thus offers a much richer view of the humanities and their potential societal relevance than the science-like approach represented by Bod.

circumstances, such as mine. It develops from the first type of knowledge, but in a different direction – not towards a phonetic script, a comparative or historical analysis, nor does it imply going native, losing one's own identity, or replacing analysis by feelings. Such research and self-reflection, combined, cannot maintain the academic distance of the natural sciences, but it can nevertheless be a serious, scholarly effort. There is something to be discovered, something truthful about the meaning the world has to someone else.

4. We are unavoidably *reflexive*, about ourselves in the dialogue, about what the insights of the other might mean to us. In human humanities, what we hear may become a claim on us. However, reflexivity in the humanities goes beyond that. We may reflect on reasoning: How do people argue? How do I argue? What are sound arguments? What are criteria for soundness? And similarly about value: How do they arrive at moral judgments? How do I decide what to do? What are criteria for sound moral deliberation? What is the status of moral claims? There are methodological and meta-ethical questions, about the conditions for life, knowledge and action. We have a way in which we understand our own existence and obligations, a 'practical self-understanding', but this may itself be the object of further reflection.

   Such reflection is typical of philosophy but arises in all forms of scholarship, and deserves to be taken seriously as part of human self-understanding. Thus, it is a great quality of Tilburg University that all Bachelor's programs include introductory courses in philosophy of science and social philosophy, for students to develop skills to reflect upon knowledge and ethics.

   Within the Tilburg School of Humanities, the reflective engagement with values and reasons also includes, as I see it, the engagement of religion and values in the project headed by Erik Borgman (2011), a project that also exemplifies the hermeneutical interest to engage in our own context the Christian tradition and the specific Roman Catholic social engagement of the University's founder, Martinus J.H. Cobbenhagen. The study of religion, as object of study, as religion of others we engage, and as, potentially, our own identity, is part of the humanities too.

The Relevance of the Humanities

Above, I defined the humanities as seeking 'to understand human self-understanding'. This comes in various types – knowledge of the specific, a quest for general patterns, the hermeneutical obligation to understand 'the other' as a fellow person, and the reflective effort to consider the justification of claims to knowledge and in ethical practice. All these may be possible, and perhaps even fascinating, but do we in fact need such research and such courses of study at an academic level? Do the humanities deserve to attract students and public funding? Given that I will serve as dean of the Tilburg School of Humanities, let me offer some ideas on the relevance of the humanities, as disciplines and study programs within the university.

A Dutch policy document, *Kwaliteit in verscheidenheid: Strategische Agenda Hoger Onderwijs, Onderzoek en Wetenschap* linked science to economic prospertity. It defined "kennis, kunde, kassa" (knowledge, application, profit) as a pipeline that should be fueled by science.[11] If this is the current climate, then why should we continue to invest in humanities? Why study the humanities at all? Here I will consider three types of responses – presenting the humanities as fundamental sciences, accepting the challenge by offering various arguments on the utility of the humanities, and arguments rooted in the nature of human humanities.

Humanities contribute fundamental knowledge. Fundamental science works best if it is not directly profit-oriented; sometimes profits come much later. According to Rens Bod, discoveries in grammar later found their application in computer languages. This link between fundamental research and practical application might not be all that different from Albert Einstein's construction of the Theory of General Relativity, a century ago this year, in which he solved fundamental issues in the understanding of gravity. Just knowledge at first, this theory has now become a necessary ingredient in precision measurements involving satellites, including those that allowed your navigation systems to give you proper directions to Tilburg. Curiosity-driven research should indeed be driven by curiosity, by questions that the scholars themselves can come up with. Requiring short-term relevance would be a poor guiding principle for policy. Fundamental research, also

[11] Concluding section: "Nieuwe kennis moet eerder leiden tot innovatie. Wetenschap als brandstof in de pijplijn kennis-kunde-kassa." (Ministerie van OCW 2011, 75); earlier on in the document, the 'pipeline' with these three terms appears as well (pp. 12 and 46). Although there has been a change of government since this policy document came out, a similar emphasis seems to be present in the more recent *Wetenschapsvisie 2025* and the additional document on a new governance structure for the Dutch Foundation for Scientific Research, NWO – a model that moves power and responsibility away from academics, giving primacy to economic or social benefits.

in the humanities, may become 'useful' because it provides insight into fundamental patterns, but the focus should be on the knowledge itself, not on its application.

I consider this a valid argument, for some types of research. However, some of its advocates are dismissive about other orientations in the humanities, as if this would be the only way to think of scholarship in the humanities and justify it.[12] Thus, in the preface to an edited volume on *The Making of the Humanities*, edited by Rens Bod and others, we find a dismissive remark about 'interpretative' approaches, those that one might identify, roughly, with the emphasis on particulars and on hermeneutical understanding (1 and 3), above:

> Dilthey's interpretative approach contributed to the current image problem of the humanities. That is, the humanities are no longer seen as the pinnacle of intellectual development but as a luxury pastime with little relevance for society and even less for economy. (Bod, Maat and Weststeijn 2014, 13)

I agree that we should think about the humanities and other sciences as fundamental disciplines, driven by curiosity and not primarily approached as a shortcut to profit. However, curiosity should be broader than this pattern-seeking type of humanities, as curiosity might also concern particulars and human motives that could become our own. Furthermore, society deserves more arguments to justify expenses, and choices regarding scarce resources, and students and their parents may desire more than 'the professor's curiosity' to justify their opting for the humanities. Thus, arguments for usefulness might be pragmatically desirable and politically appropriate.

[12] A similarly narrow understanding of science and scholarship seems to dominate the petition *Researchers First!,* drawn up by some colleagues at Tilburg University (Van Damme et al. 2014a, b). Van Damme (2014, 6) draws out the analogy with a soccer team: "Scoring in science means pushing further outward the frontier of what is known" – an analogy betraying a narrow understanding of research in the human sphere, including economy and law, the two domains the authors of the petition primarily came from. Their texts emphasize research; teaching seems to take a secondary place. New to the Tilburg environment, I wonder whether this 'petition' might perhaps be understood as a move in a competition between different interests *within* a particular school, especially an internal struggle over funding and funding mechanisms. Another element in these texts: the authors criticize the role of non-academics in the university, but tend to locate everyone heavily involved in administration in the non-academic 'camp', thus making the dichotomy almost trivially true. In my opinion, the presence of non-academics on the governing board and the interest in social values may be an adequate reflection of the social and political accountability that society rightfully expects from us, given that we as a university also receive substantial public support, in addition to the academic accountability that we are bound by within the academic community, and rightly so.

Humanities are useful The usefulness of the humanities can be argued for in various ways. We will go through five options, from the economic via the social to the cultural.

(1) *Business* interests may make some humanities very useful. According to a previous chairman of the Dutch employers association, Bernard Wientjes, we should make German obligatory in secondary education, as Germany is our largest neighbor and most important trade partner.[13] Similar arguments might be put forward for Chinese and languages and cultures of other emerging economies. Other work carried out in the humanities may have commercial value itself, e.g. in business communication, automatic translation, or gaming.

The business side of the humanities is broader than people might at first sight suspect. Leiden – to draw on my previous experience – as a city not only has a Bioscience Park; the economy of the old town is shaped at least as much by the humanities as it is by the hard sciences, with museums, internationally-oriented travel agents, offices in design and editing, and many other small businesses that have their roots in humanities scholarship. According to a report from 2013, the humanities business in Leiden is substantially larger than the science-based business; in terms of companies 34 % versus 7 %; as science-based business tends to have a larger staff, the gap is smaller in employees, but still to the advantage of the humanities: 34 % versus 22 %.[14] And of course, most of the return on investment lands elsewhere, when students take responsible roles in society. Thus, one might suspect that every euro invested in the humanities yields a multiple of that in return on investment. A study of the economic benefits of the humanities might perhaps be an interesting project for a colleague from TISEM, the Tilburg School of Economics and Management; I would not be pessimistic about its outcome.

(2) *Society* offers an even greater potential for arguments on an intrinsic need for the humanities. A recent declaration by the Association of American Universities, the Association of East Asian Research Universities, the League of European Research Universities, and some other multi-university organizations, representing in total 158 research-intensive universities[15], opened as follows:

[13] See *http://machmit.nl/web/wientjes-laat-duits-verplicht-worden/*, accessed January 1 2015.

[14] Margreet Steiner, Eric Went, eds., *Alfa's van Leiden: Creatief, ondernemend én succesvol*, p. 8.They use a very broad understanding of 'humanities' that includes archeology, anthropology, political sciences, and even law (p. 103).

[15] Leiden Statement, 2014. Both with respect to the *Horizon2020* framework of the EU and this document, important lobby work has been done by deans of humanities faculties of members of the League of Research Universities, including my colleague from Leiden, H.W. (Wim) van den Doel. A whole set of, examples that make the case for *The Public Value of th4 Humanities* has been edited by Jonathan Bate (2011).

> The social sciences and humanities are indispensable to understanding and addressing contemporary global challenges and to grasping emerging opportunities. Every challenge the world faces has a human dimension, and no solution can be achieved without enlisting the support and efforts of individuals, communities and societies. The social sciences and humanities cultivate knowledge about human expression, behavior, and social life that is essential to understanding the human context of these challenges and crafting viable solutions to them.

In the most recent framework program of the European Union on research funding for the period 2014-2020, *Horizon 2020*, a prominent category for funding programs is 'societal challenges'. These include health, agriculture, energy, transport, and climate – areas where the leading scholars may come from engineering and medical professions, but also "Europe in a changing world - inclusive, innovative and reflective societies" and "Secure societies - protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens."[16] With the epithets 'inclusive, innovative and reflective' being used, one may expect many issues of cultural diversity to be on the table, while the addition of freedom of citizens and protection of their security also has the potential of going beyond an all too straightforward legal or surveillance discourse. As with pure research, it may be difficult for societal challenges to anticipate what will be most useful, as unexpected political developments may create unanticipated needs for cultural expertise. Such expertise might be relevant in many different contexts, including those that may at first be understood mainly in engineering terms. For instance, as I argued before, environmental policy depends not only on science, such as provided by the International Panel on Climate Change, but equally also on worldviews and culture. In India an environmental initiative to clean up the Ganges, the Ganga Action Plan of 1986, withdrawn in 2000, failed, partially due to insufficient attention given to the religious meanings ascribed to the river, and the need to engage religious leaders and communities on their terms.[17]

[16] In the basic sales pitch, *Horizon 2020* may not be that different from the pipeline 'kennis, kunde, kassa' of the Dutch government some years ago. *Horizon 2020* "promises more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market." Thus according to the official website, which continues by focusing on job creation and economic growth, on coupling research and innovation: *http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020* (accessed Jan 4 2015).

[17] The recently elected president Modi has announced his dedication to make the sacred river clean in five years (May 28, 2014); see *http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-05-27/india-s-new-leader-channels-gandhi-to-clean-mother-ganga.html*. Given his strong links to Hindu nationalism, he might stand a good chance of getting religious leaders, engineers and business to work together for this purpose.

(3) *Democracy needs the humanities*, according to Martha Nussbaum in her *Not for Profit: Why Democracy needs the Humanities*. The humanities are useful, albeit not for profit. They should educate young people to become critical thinkers who can challenge customary beliefs and practices. A valued example is Socrates, the Greek philosopher who was condemned to death for corrupting the young people of Athens by posing his critical questions. A biblical association might be the humanities scholar as a prophet. Nussbaum emphasizes the development of empathy, of appreciating the perspectives of others, the ability to spot abuse of language and of power, and the ability to engage in civil disagreement and hence political discourse. Much is at stake, as she argues in the opening sentences of her book:

> We are in the midst of a crisis of massive proportions and grave global significance. (...) I mean a crisis that goes largely unnoticed, like a cancer; a crisis that is likely to be, in the long run, far more damaging to the future of democratic self-government: a worldwide crisis in education.
>
> (...) Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievement. The future of the world's democracies hangs in the balance.
>
> What are these radical changes? The humanities and the arts are being cut away, in both primary/secondary and college/university education in virtually every nation in the world. Seen by policy makers as useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay competitive in the global market, they are rapidly losing their place in curricula, and also in the minds and hearts of parents and children.

Someone defending a similar view is Geoffrey Galt Harpham (2011, 95-96), although he is more self-critical about the humanities, as in the past they have also contributed to racism, colonialism, and elitism.

> Humanists today must, I submit, come to grips with their own tradition. Specifically, they must bring themselves to recognize the problematic fact that when their tradition has asserted itself, that assertion has characteristically been framed in conservative, melancholic, or merely oppositional terms, with humanists positioning themselves on the losing side of a struggle with the mighty forces of capitalism, science, or modernity.

> (...) If humanists today would reorient their discipline and pull the word from the stone of reaction, they must rethink a self-description that has in recent years been dominated by terms such as subversive, oppositional, critical, and resistant. They must ask themselves, in an activist spirit, what great questions, what pressing issues they might have something to contribute to by virtue of their training and expertise.

Are the humanities necessary for democracy? Certainly, in a complex society such as ours, widespread literacy is essential, as is a well-informed informed general public, people who can evaluate merits of arguments. This may require training teachers and others involved in public outreach – but would it also justify scholarly research and higher education in the humanities?

The democracy argument advocated by Nussbaum is sympathetic, as she advocates values that her readers are likely to share. However, I think her argument is fundamentally misguided. Claiming a particular moral or social role for the academic humanities seems to me to neglect the importance of all citizens (and hence, an emphasis on elementary and secondary education) and to pass by the many exemplary moral contributions made by people with totally different disciplinary backgrounds, such as economists addressing inequality (e.g., Jan Tinbergen, Amartya Sen), physicists who stood up for civil liberties and responsibility (e.g., Andrei Sakharov, the Pugwash movement), and medical doctors (e.g. Médecins Sans Frontières). Furthermore, competence in the humanities need not deliver the goods intended, by this political standard. Let me merely recall an image I owe to Paul van Dijk, ethicist at Twente University. In an interview upon his retirement, he spoke of a bald hairdresser – 'een kale kapper'.[18] Someone who may have great skills in caring for other people's hair need not have any himself. By the same token, an ethicist may be immoral. More broadly speaking, civil skills are not necessarily promoted by the humanities. They might even be counterproductive, as humanities scholars may be so well-versed in language and rational argumentation that a moderate issue of policy becomes a major battle over methods and worldviews.

(4) A more modest version of the usefulness argument is the contribution that the humanities make to *enrich culture*. This is also a utilitarian strategy for articulating the value of the humanities. Helen Small gives serious consideration to the argument that engagement in the humanities "increases the kind and quality of the pleasures available in a culture"[19] The humanities may stimulate the arts and letters; they may contribute

[18] "Een ethicus is als een kale kapper." *UT Nieuws: Weekblad van de Universiteit Twente*, 11 juni 1998, p. 2
[19] Helen Small, interviewed in *Inside Higher Education*, April 28 2014; *https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/04/28/new-book-explores-various-arguments-value-humanities*see also (Small 2013, chapter 3).

to the preservation of cultural heritage. Historians deepen our understanding of history, nationally, locally and globally.

This argument might conflate the significance of literature, music, and art with scholarship on such human self-expressions. Human culture would be less rich if there had not been great composers, playwrights, novelists and poets; their works may inspire, nourish empathy, satisfy a longing for beauty, or disturb us by the presentation of tragic features of existence. But did Mozart, Bach, Shakespeare and Ibsen need the humanities? And does continued appreciation of their work require the humanities, as academic disciplines? We certainly need musicians that are able to play difficult pieces of music, but do we also need musicologists? Artists and authors can do without the humanities.

While much personal knowledge would be lost in a world without literature (Harpham 2012, 429), this does not in itself justify literary studies. But, so Harpham argues, "Of course, personal knowledge is slippery, inconstant, error-prone, and suspect in many ways. This is why scholarship and criticism are needed, to guide, stimulate, model, and inform this knowledge." I wonder whether this observation is correct – after all, literary studies are not there or engaged in to correct errors of novelists, or even errors made by readers. Academic reflection might even be counterproductive, from the point of view of the practitioner. Just as religious leaders do not need religious studies, and might quite likely be disturbed by the discipline, so too can great novelists or painters easily do without a degree in literary studies or art history. Still, given the way humans are influenced by the reflection on humanity, a deeper level of engagement with language, history, and culture will enrich culture and serve nuance.

(5) *The usefulness of uselessness* is another, almost paradoxical argument. In Dutch, every now and then people will quote a famous line by the poet Lucebert, 'alles van waarde is weerloos' – everything that has value is vulnerable, defenseless. The poem is about the transitory nature of existence[20], but this is not the insight the quote is used express. Quite often, it is used to present the humanities as a domain of contemplation that need not pay off via action, unlike professions such as business, engineering, law or medicine, and thus the humanities cannot defend themselves by their fruits.

[20] Peter Hofman, "De filosofie van een weerloos citaat", *Trouw* 31 January 2006. *http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/1681924/2006/01/31/De-filosofie-van-een-weerloos-citaat.dhtml* As the opening line is 'The very old one sings', following Cornelis Verhoeven, Hofman assumes that the poem is about Parmenides.

Such a view of the nature of the humanities might justify the investment of personal time and creativity, but it hardly justifies the use of public resources for teaching and for research. More importantly, a contemplative orientation does not do justice to any of the four orientations described in the previous section – knowing about particulars, discerning patters, understanding others, and reflecting upon arguments and values. The argument may have a certain 'Sitz im Leben', as idleness may distinguish an elite. Ordinary people have to work, but those with enough economic resources can use some of these in ways that seem useless; in doing so, they underline their status as those who have economic and cultural capital.

We have briefly touched upon five arguments about usefulness. In my opinion, the democracy argument fails to hit the target as one should leave political engagement to citizens as citizens, rather than to scholars, as if they had any particular political expertise. Having worked in religious studies, I am allergic to programs that assign to academics the task of modernizing religious traditions; bringing about such reforms would be a religious rather than an academic task, to be left up to the people involved. But training students who might become teachers, journalists, researchers for NGOs, or civil servants, and training the trainers, would be very appropriate tasks.

The other arguments for usefulness have their own strengths and weaknesses. They provide some justification, but in their instrumentality do not do justice to the humanities as described earlier in this address. To come to the central argument, in my opinion, we need to go back to the understanding of humanities as rooted in human self-understanding and self-expression. Given that most of the work has been done in previous sections, the description of this argument, which roots humanities in human nature, 'human humanities', can be brief.

Human Humanities

Humans are interestingly diverse, self-reflective and expressive, especially in language. With our reflective and analytical capacities, we also reflect upon humans – ourselves and others, individually and collectively, familiar and strange. This human self-reflection may take the form of curiosity about particular languages, histories, cultures and religions. It may stimulate us to seek patterns across different forms of human behavior. And, thinking of the moral connotation of 'humanity', self-understanding as humans brings with it the obligation to seek to understand the other, to engage in dialogue across cultural distances of various kinds.

A similar argument could be made more pragmatically. In the previous section, we saw that some considerations about usefulness may be somewhat narrow – we need people

who speak German fluently, but would that justify the study of medieval Middle High German or German idealist poetry? We need teachers who can train people to analyze well and express themselves clearly and eloquently, but they do not need to turn all civilized speakers into linguists. Thus, so one might argue, we could limit our work to such instrumental purposes – training teachers who are competent enough to teach. However, being humans, our work resists narrow constraints. Someone learning German might notice similarities to Frisian, Dutch and English – and thus raise questions about the historical development of these languages. Training people to analyze well raises questions about methods and criteria, and thus questions of a more academic nature. If we want to train good teachers, they will need to acquire a broader basis than the immediate knowledge they need to have at their disposal in everyday teaching practice. In their training, they not only need to acquire professional skills, but also broader academic habitus and skills. This not only applies to teachers, but equally to those working on intercultural understanding, on heritage, on libraries and the data-driven society, and much else. Furthermore, our students need more than the professional skills for today because the world is changing rapidly; they will need to be prepared for positions that do not exist yet. Thus, to use the teacher as an example – the demand for teachers requires training by specialists, including those dealing with particular issues in greater depth and uncovering long histories, patterns and meanings.

Thus, my main argument is that *human humanities are indispensable for humans and necessary for the good of a complex and quickly changing society,* as professional roles require deeper scholarship. Teaching requires exploration, as an attitude that is being taught and as input for teaching. It is in the nature of humans as self-reflective beings that they reflect on their self-understandings; this justifies the humanities "for its own sake" – the position Helen Small also argued for in her *The Value of the Humanities* (2013). It is our nature to be reflective; we not only communicate but reflect on communication. We not only have a culture, we are revising and creating culture. Not all reflection is academic, of course, but the study of humans is one of the most human things to do. We should not want to do without that.[21]

[21] In *The Value of the Humanities* (2013) Helen Small comes to a similar conclusion about the importance of the humanities "for its own sake", after an historically informed argument. I am grateful to Odile Heynders, colleague in Tilburg, for drawing my attention to Small's book. Stefan Collini, in *What are Universities For?* announces early in the chapter on "The character of the humanities" that at the end of the chapter he will "directly address the vexed question of how best to go about 'defending' the humanities" (62). When he gets there, he points, very briefly, to human life: "The kinds of understanding and judgement exercised in the humanities are of a piece with the kinds of understanding and judgement involved in living a life. All we can say at this point is that *that*, in the end, is why they interest us and seem worthwhile" (85)

For Which Culture? In Which Language?

The humanities have cultural significance. For which culture? Given that I am speaking here at a Dutch university, receiving Dutch public funding, we should think of the Netherlands as our primary context. Why then, do I conduct this lecture in English? Why not in Dutch?

Recently, four colleagues from the University of Amsterdam and the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, have presented a plea for Dutch as the primary language of instruction in university programs in the humanities. A central argument in their essay is that students should learn to use at least one language well, and this should be Dutch, their mother tongue.[22]

This central argument is supported by various subsidiary arguments. Language is the main instrument of the humanities, and this instrument itself is also a major object of study in the humanities. To make any progress in this area, linguistic skills have to be excellent. Furthermore, it would be embarrassing if beautiful objects studied by the humanities are described in clumsy sentences. And students need time to develop crucial skills; they should not be required to write in a language they do not know well enough while still learning how to analyze and argue. Except for the few who aim to become members of the international academic community, students will mostly find jobs in our own country, where they may have positions that involve teaching and communication, and thus need excellent communicative skills, and hence eloquence in their mother tongue. The emphasis on English undermines competence in other languages. Internationalization should be broader than the focus on English speaking countries and cultures.

I concur that we should aspire to high standards in linguistic skills, whichever language we use. I also agree that we should not only think of future academics; in a steady state, each senior professor needs only one successor, while we serve many more students. And we do have cultural obligations that make it obvious that some courses and programs ought

[22] *ENGELSTALIG ONDERWIJS BINNEN ACASA? Een manifest tot behoud van het Nederlands*, by Lucinda Dirven, Emilie van Opstall, Mieke Koenen, Piet Gerbrandy (27 October 2014); ACASA stands for Amsterdam Centre for Ancient Studies and Archeology. The final sentence of their manifesto: "We roepen u op hierover met ons in debat te gaan. In het Nederlands, wel te verstaan." (We invite you to debate this with us, in Dutch.) My apologies for using this lecture to offer some comments, in English. These authors made an exception for the 'research master's programs', thereby implicitly accepting that English is the primary language of science and scholarship today, and thus going against the very orientation of the report *Nederlands tenzij* ... by the commissie 'Nederlands als wetenschapstaal', published by the KNAW in 2003.

to be taught in Dutch. The Tilburg School of Humanities trains students who qualify as high school teachers of Dutch language and literature – a course of studies best pursued in Dutch.

However, that excellent linguistic skills are particularly necessary in studying language seems to me a fallacious argument. Linguistic skills have to be of a similar level when one studies language, philosophy, history, law, sociology, or business. Besides, most disciplines have vocabularies that are partially 'technical', typical of the discipline. Thus, linguistics as the discipline studying language has developed a phonetic script that is not tied to any particular language but that can capture any distinctive sound in human languages. The essay conflates eloquence and the analytical and argumentative academic use of language, which seems to me to be misguided. As for their future professions, many students may find themselves in positions that demand as much of their skills in English as their skills in Dutch. By offering programs in English, or mixed programs with some courses being taught in English and others in Dutch, universities also prepare their Dutch students for the modern world.

Why did I decide to give this address in English? One consideration was *inclusiveness*, as we have students, Ph.D. candidates and faculty who might not be able to follow the lecture in Dutch. English is our shared 'second language' – not at the 'near native' level as the Amsterdam colleagues seem to require, but at least a shared one, like Latin once was for the scholarly world. I realize that in doing so I am also excluding some who may not be able to easily follow the lecture in English. And I would hope that it would have been unnecessary to conduct this inaugural address in English if the audience had been made up exclusively of faculty working here, as it is desirable that they should be able to follow both Dutch and English, at least passively.

A second consideration for me is the *profile* of the Tilburg School of Humanities. With the strong emphasis on contemporary culture and on information technologies, our orientation differs from that of more traditional humanities programs that place a stronger emphasis on 'high culture' as exemplified by the traditional Dutch *gymnasium,* the equivalent of the British grammar schools. Our liberal arts and sciences program, conducted entirely in English, is one that helps students to develop the rhetorical and analytical skills advocated by the colleagues from Amsterdam, but they primarily learn those skills in English. If that is not the student's mother tongue, their training brings with it extra challenges, but the linguistic shift at the same time provides an opportunity to go beyond ingrained habits, as it brings with it a certain freshness, and the opportunity to take one's courses in an interestingly mixed classroom.

A third consideration for me is the potential *audience beyond the lecture*. Our university is situated in Tilburg; we do have a regional and national role. I have fond memories of Brabant where in my younger years I spent many weekends and summers. However, while it is located in a particular place, any university is a node in a worldwide network of research and education. Our time calls for an understanding of the nature and relevance of the humanities that can be articulated for an international forum.

Students will come to operate in a world that is becoming more and more global. The dynamic interplay of local and global processes is caught in the newly created term 'glocalization' – the global takes on a particular form in local circumstances. The global variety of 'local' contexts is accessed in English, or rather, in Englishes, English no longer merely being the language of a few particular countries, but itself a central dimension of globalizing developments. In a sense, this language has been taken from the native speakers and taken on a life of its own, although it still tends to give those working in English speaking countries an unjustified advantage, and privileges trends and phenomena that are prominent there. We should aspire to do justice to both the local and the global, for the sake of our students, given the world they live in, and for the sake of our scholarship, which is part of a worldwide web of scholarship.

The Tilburg School of Humanities

Although in the previous sections I spoke about the humanities in general, I did so with the Tilburg School of Humanities in mind. We work on communication and language, and on culture in its various expressions – and these programs have a strong engagement with the technological culture of our age, especially the way digital technology is reshaping our communication, our languages and our society. Approaches are quantitative, measuring, experimenting, driven by 'big data', as well as more hermeneutical, but there too, data-driven, collecting knowledge on language diversity and transformations, on the self-interpretations of modern pilgrims traveling to Santiago de Compostella, and much else. For new possibilities for empirical work, we are especially looking forward to the augmented reality lab funded by DAF, opening later this year.

Aside of the data-driven programs of Communication- and Information Studies and Cultural Studies, we have the reflective program that is philosophy, not only as a program in its own right, but also as a contribution to all Bachelor's programs in the university. And we also have an integrative program, Liberal Arts and Sciences – broad, reflective, preparing students for contemporary culture and for Master's programs of all sorts. A

program like that, comparable to a university college elsewhere in the Netherlands, is not just about studying society and humans, but also about engaging in society, acting responsibly, and showing leadership. There are differences across and within programs, but also common features. They all belong to the humanities, as interesting and relevant disciplines in a technological age.

Tilburg University

Let me conclude the main part of this lecture with a few words on Tilburg University. If one uses a very general scheme to describe reality, there are two or three domains of knowledge: One is the physical and cosmological domain, the study of phenomena not determined by humans. Tilburg leaves that to other universities. Another one is the domain of humans, of which I have been speaking today. And still another one might perhaps be added as a third domain, that of ultimacy, human reflection on the deepest ground of it all, which would bring us to theology. Tilburg has a School of Theology; in many respects, I consider the humanities and theology as close cousins. However, let me very briefly also consider the other disciplines of Tilburg University: economics and business, law, and the social and behavioral sciences. All these programs are about humans and their interactions. Social sciences might be considered applied humanities, abstracting from motives and meanings. Law focuses on social arrangements, economics on the way people share, employ and divide scarce resources, while business deals with the ways in which humans collaborate in professional contexts. Fundamentally, we are all involved in one large project, although each of the disciplines limits itself to certain aspects of human ideas and practices. While abstracting might make life easier, we might get closer to real humans once we handle more data and involve more insights, and thus engage a broader humanities orientation.

Let me therefore end the academic part with a suggestion to the Executive Board. Given that we all are studying humans in their activities, their self-understanding and their self-expression, you might rename the university as the

> Tilburg University of Humanities.

The motto "Understanding Society" could be updated as well. Society is the human collective, shaped not merely by scarcity (economy), law, and social and psychological processes, but by human meanings. We all are doing humanities. Thus, the motto of the university could become:

> Understanding humans.

Words of gratitude

Let me conclude with some words of gratitude. In my first weeks here in Tilburg, I have enjoyed meeting various colleagues in the Tilburg School of Humanities, and appreciated greatly the way you have made me feel welcome. I look forward to learning about your work and your understandings of the humanities. I would especially like to thank colleagues from the Department of Philosophy, which is my new academic home.

As dean, I will be in a position comparable to that of a conductor – who has to serve the whole orchestra, even though individual players know their own instrument much better[23] - or that of an ambassador, who seeks to represent the work done in the faculty to the outside world. Within the Tilburg School of Humanities, I would like to extend my gratitude in particular to my predecessor as dean, my colleagues on the faculty board, especially Lex Oostrom who is an invaluable guide in this organization, and all those who provide support, of whom I want to mention in particular Anita Vink, and Hans Verhulst, who corrected the English of this lecture.

I also want to express my gratitude for the way I have been received by the deans of the other schools. Although I may have given an imperialistic impression when above I included your territories within the humanities, rest assured that this was done merely to signal the conviction that there should be many opportunities for fruitful co-existence and collaboration. I thank the Board of Tilburg University for appointing me. I hope to contribute, with the School of Humanities and in my own academic work, to the health and reputation of our university as a whole. I appreciate my appointment as a sign of confidence, not just in me but also in the Tilburg School of Humanities as a valid and viable unity in Tilburg University.

I have hardly met any students in Tilburg yet; that, unfortunately, is a risk of an administrative role. However, your education is important to me, as working with students and Ph.D. candidates is one of the great joys of working in higher education. I thus look forward to future interactions, either in- or outside the courses that I will be teaching.

I owe much to teachers and colleagues from previous stages in my life, including those at Utrecht University and Groningen University, the Bezinningscentrum at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, the philosophy of technology group at Twente University, and the colleagues in religious studies at Leiden University, where I gave my first classes in

[23] An image I took, out of its context, from the inaugural address of my thesis advisor R. Hensen in Groningen.

religious studies on '9/11', a day that changed the urgency of such studies. In my new position I also expect to benefit greatly from my experiences in the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University and its faculty board, where I learned to deal with disciplines that were, and still are, Chinese to me.

I particularly want to express my gratitude to the colleagues in the NWO funded Horizon research program 'What can the humanities contribute to our practical self-understanding', with colleagues, postdocs and Ph.D. candidates from Utrecht University, Leiden University and the Erasmus University Rotterdam. A Ph.D. candidate of mine in this project, Annemarie van Stee, has inspired me for today's lecture by stressing the importance of reflexivity in her philosophical project on cognitive neuroscience and the self, while the collaboration in the group as a whole, under the leadership of Marcus Düwell, has stimulated my reflection on the humanities and my appreciation of 'practical self-understanding' as a major feature of human existence.

I also am very grateful for the international dimension of academic life: authors and reviewers for *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* and colleagues in many different places across Europe and on other continents. Alongside the contact with students, contacts with colleagues from many different backgrounds are a most rewarding facet of academic existence.

I also owe much to friends, recent and from way back, including friends present here today from my elementary school, my student years, and summer camps I have been involved in. Even more important are our three children and their friends, exemplifying the potential of the 'next generation' as they have grown up to become very fine adults. Last but not least, there is Zwanet who has travelled with me on life's journey, including all the academic moves we made – one memorable one being from sunny Berkeley to a snowstorm in Chicago on the 2nd day of Christmas, over 25 years ago, and another one, workwise, from Leiden to Tilburg.

My gratitude to you all, for your contributions to my life and my work, past and present.

Ik heb gezegd.

References

Achterhuis, Hans, e.a. 1997. *Von stoommachine tot cyborg: Denken over techniek in de nieuwe wereld.* Amsterdam: AMBO.

Bate, Jonathan, ed. 2011. *The Public Value of the Humanities.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Blommaert, Jan. 2012. *Over open en gesloten geesten: Pleidooi voor een geestrijke wetenschap.* Tilburg: Tilburg University.

Bod, Rens. 2010. *De vergeten wetenschappen: Een geschiedenis van de humaniora.* Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.

—. 2013. *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Patterns and Principles from Antiquity to the Present.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bod, Rens, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn 2014. *The Making of the Humanities. Volume III: The Modern Humanities.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Borgman, Erik P.N.M. 2011. *Met het oog op het goede leven. Cobbenhagen en onze universitaire cultuur.* Tilburg: Tilburg University.

Carroll, Lewis. 1939. *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*, illustrations by J. Tenniel, introduction by A. Wollcott. New York: Modern Library.

Collini, Stefan. *2012. What Are Universities For?* London: Penguin Books.

Coolen, Maarten. 1992. *De machine voorbij: Over het zelfbegrip van de mens in het tijdperk van de informatietechniek.* Meppel: Boom.

Crick, Francis. 1994. *The Astonishing Hypothesis. The Scientific Search for the Soul.* New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster.

Van Damme, E.E.C. 2014. *Trying to Make a Difference: Challenges for Tilburg University. https://pure.uvt.nl/portal/files/3169023/Challenges_for_Tilburg_University_2_May_2014_Final_.pdf* , accessed 4 January 2015 [check]

Van Damme, Eric, Cyrille Fijnaut, Marc Groenhuijsen, Siegwart Lindenberg, Arjen van Witteloostuijn, Aart de Zeeuw. 2014a. *Put Researchers First, For a Better Tilburg University.* Tilburg: Tilburg University. *https://www.change.org/p/executive-board-of-tilburg-university-put-researchers-first-for-a-better-tilburg-university*, accessed 4 January 2015

—. 2014b. "Visie? Bij ons op Tilburg University gaat het om geld." *NRC Handelsblad* 11 juni, p. 16. *http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/van/2014/juli/11/visie-bij-ons-op-tilburg-university-gaat-het-om-g-1397501*, accessed 4 January 2015

Deacon, Terrence. 1997. *The Symbolic Species: The Co-evolution of Language and the Human Brain.* New York: Norton.

Dertouzos, Michael L. 1997. *What Will Be: How the New World of Information Will Change Our Lives.* New York: HarperEdge.

Dewey, John. 1934. *Art as Experience.* London: Allen & Unwin. Reprinted as *John Dewey, The Later Works, 1925-1953, Volume 10: 1934*, eds. J.A. Boydston and H.F. Simon.

Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
Dirven, Lucinda, Emilie van Opstall, Mieke Koenen, en Piet Gerbrandy. 2014. *Engelstalig Onderwijs binnen ACASA? Een manifest tot behoud van het Nederlands.* Amsterdam, Folia Civitatis, 27 October 2014. *http://www.foliaweb.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Engelstalig-onderwijs-in-ACASA.pdf* accessed 4 January 2015.
Dworkin, Ronald. 2000. *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Inequality.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Eggers, Dave. 2013. *The Circle.* New York: Random House.
Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Religion as a Cultural System." In Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books.
Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. 2011. *The Humanities and the Dream of America.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
—. 2012. "Two Points about Two Cultures." In *Creating Consilience: Integrating the Sciences and the Humanities*, edited by Edward Slingerland and Mark Collard. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hedlund-de Witt, Annick. 2013. *Worldviews and the Transition to Sustainable Societies: An Exploration of the Cultural and Psychological Dimensions of our Global Environmental Challenges.* Dissertation Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
Hofstadter, Douglas. R. 1979. *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid.* New York: Basic Books.
Hulme, Mike. 2009. *Why We Disagree about Climate Change. Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Jong A.F. de. 2008. "Historians of religion as the agents of religious change." In: *The Study of Religion and the Training of Muslim Clergy in Europe: Academic and Religious Freedom in the 21st Century*, eds. Willem B. Drees and Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld. Leiden: Leiden University Press. 195-218.
—. 2009. *Religies zonder traditie.* (Oratie, 21 september.) Leiden: Universiteit Leiden.
Kitcher, Philip. 1993. *The Advancement of Science: Science without Legend, Objectivity without Illusions.* New York: Oxford University Press.
—. 2011. *The Ethical Project.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Klein, Naomi. 2014. *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs. The Climate.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
Lee, Harper. 1960. *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Philadelphia: Lippincott.
Leiden Statement. 2014. *The Role of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the Global Research Landscape, announced by AAU, AEARU, LERU, GO8, RU11, Russell Group and the U15 Canada.* See *http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/leiden-statement.pdf*, accessed 4 January 2015.

McCutcheon, Russell T., ed. *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of religion: A Reader.* London: Cassell.

McMullin, Ernan. 1982. "Values in Science." In *PSA 1982*, eds. Peter D. Asquith and Thomas Nickles. East Lansing, MI: Philosophy of Science Association, 3-28. Reprinted in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47 (2012): 686-709.

Ministerie van OCW. 2011. *Kwaliteit in verscheidenheid: Strategische Agenda Hoger Onderwijs, Onderzoek en Wetenschap.* Den Haag: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap; *http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2011/07/01/kwaliteit-in-verscheidenheid.html*, accessed 4 January 2015.

—. 2014a. *Wetenschapsvisie 2025: Keuzes voor de toekomst.* Den Haag: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap. *http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2014/11/25/wetenschapsvisie-2025-keuzes-voor-de-toekomst.html*, accessed 4 January 2015.

—. 2014b. *Van lappendeken naar een nationaal discours en centrale programmering: Advies voor een nieuwe governance, werkwijze en organisatiestructuur voor NWO.* Den Haag: Ministerie van onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap. *http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2014/11/25/van-lappendeken-naar-een-nationaal-discours-en-centrale-programmering.html* , accessed 4 January 2015.

Morris, Desmond. 1967. *The Naked Ape*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Mul, Jos de. 2014. *Kunstmatig van nature: Onderweg naar Homo sapiens 3.0*. Stichting maand van de Filosofie.

Munk, René P.H. 2005. "ICT and the character of finitude." In *Creative Creatures: Values and Ethics in Theology, Science and Technology*, eds. Ulf Görman, Willem B. Drees, and Hubert Meisinger. London: T&T Clark Continuum, 15-33.

Nussbaum, Martha. 2010. *Not for Profit. Why Society Needs the Humanities.*

Ruijter, Arie de. 2014. *Besturen: Een ambigue bezigheid.* Rede bij gelegenheid van zijn afscheid als hoogleraar sociale wetenschappen en decaan van Tilburg School of Humanities, 28 november 2014. Tilburg.

Ruse, Michael. 1999. *Mystery of Mysteries: Is Evolution a Social Construction?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

—. 2013. "Science and Values: My Debt to Ernan McMullin." *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 47: 686-709.

Small, Helen. 2013. *The Value of the Humanities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Steiner, Margreet, and Eric Went, eds. 2013. *Alfa's van Leiden: Creatief, ondernemend én succesvol.* Leiden: Stichting Leiden Communicatiestad.

Swaab, Dick, 2012. *Wij zijn ons brein.* Amsterdam: Atlas Contact.

Colophon

graphic design
Beelenkamp Ontwerpers, Tilburg
cover photography
Maurice van den Bosch
print
PrismaPrint, Tilburg University